

Australia intensifies military preparations for US-China conflict over Taiwan

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At the urging of the Biden administration, the Australian government and the country's military are working intensely with the US to ramp up their preparations for what could be a catastrophic war against China for control over Taiwan.

The plans would place Australian forces on the front line of a US drive to reassert Washington's global hegemony that is increasingly focused on the strategically and economically crucial island, just 160 kilometres from the Chinese mainland.

The *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) informed its corporate readership last Friday: "The Australian government has sharply escalated its internal preparations for potential military action in the Taiwan Strait."

The AFR said unnamed "sources" had told it that "the Australian Defence Force was planning for a potential worst-case scenario if the United States and China clashed over Taiwan, prompting debate over the scope and scale of Canberra's contribution to what would be an unprecedented conflict in the region."

Despite the details being hidden from public view, the plans are evidently detailed. "Options include contributing to an allied effort with submarines, as well as maritime surveillance aircraft, air-to-air refuellers and potentially Super Hornet fighters operating from US bases in Guam or the Philippines, and even Japan," the newspaper reported. Another "option"—said to be riskier—was to incorporate Air Warfare Destroyers into US aircraft carrier groups.

"There is no doubt Australia would be called on to support the United States if there was a conflict with China," the AFR report insisted.

Washington's hand in stepping up these preparations was indicated late last month when Michael Goldman, the US chargé d'affaires in Australia—currently

Washington's highest representative in the country—said during an Australian National University podcast that the two allies' "strategic planning" covered a "range of contingencies ... of which Taiwan is obviously an important component."

As no doubt intended by the Biden administration, Goldman's comments were widely reported in prominent media outlets in Asia and the US, heightening the provocation toward Beijing over the island.

In recent weeks both the outgoing and incoming commanders of the US Indo-Pacific command, Admirals Phil Davidson and John Aquilino, have warned of a war over China within the next six years, or even earlier.

Davidson and Aquilino accused China of planning to "invade" Taiwan. In reality, the US is undercutting the "One China" policy, established in 1979 when Washington ended diplomatic relations with Taiwan, recognising Beijing as the government of all China, including Taiwan.

The Biden administration is stepping up an array of destabilising moves initiated by the Trump White House, including the junking of previous restrictions on contact between US and Taiwanese officials and the development of closer military collaboration with Taiwan.

Last week, an "unofficial" US delegation became the latest in a series of high profile visits to Taiwan. The delegation included Richard Armitage—the anti-China "hawk" who served as George W Bush's deputy secretary of state. Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen told the delegation her government would work with the US to deter China's "adventurous manoeuvres and provocations."

Speaking last week at an Indian foreign affairs

conference, known as the Raisina Dialogue, chief of Australia's Defence Force General Angus Campbell justified the plans for war over Taiwan, saying all militaries undertook "a whole variety of planning" and "rarely ever talk about it."

However, the fact that such military preparations are being publicly "talked about" is a warning of how far the Biden administration is prepared to go to block China from challenging the supremacy over the Indo-Pacific that the US obtained via victory in World War II.

"Analysts" cited by the AFR said the US pressure on Australia to commit to join a US attack on China had intensified with last month's first-ever Quad summit, convened by President Joe Biden with the leaders of Japan, India and Australia. Michael Shoebridge from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a government-funded and US-linked thinktank, said: "Biden is using fast multilateralism. Obama wanted to get everyone in the tent and consult. Biden doesn't want to do that. He wants partners to work with him at the speed that he needs to work."

Another indication of the pace of developments came last week with Biden's decision to end the long, disastrous and criminal US military campaign in Afghanistan, in order to concentrate forces further in the Indo-Pacific. That announcement was immediately matched by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who cited last year's defence policy update, which called for the Australian military to shift focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific.

A "former Defence official" told the AFR there would be questions in the government over whether the ANZUS Treaty automatically applied in the event of an alleged Chinese strike against Taiwan. Article IV of that US-Australia-New Zealand pact, signed in 1951, commits each party to meet the "common danger" from an attack on their "armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

That issue points to how sharply the Australian ruling class has shifted its position to commit itself to a US-led war, despite China becoming Australian capitalism's largest export market over the past two decades.

In 2004, the Bush administration sought an immediate explanation after Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, during a visit to China,

described the ANZUS Treaty as "symbolic." Downer said Australia would not automatically support the US in a conflict with China over Taiwan. Downer's comments were denounced by Australia's military and political establishment, including the Labor Party's then shadow foreign minister Kevin Rudd, as a threat to the US alliance.

Two years later it was revealed that at least seven diplomatic cables had been exchanged with Washington over Downer's remarks, prompting Prime Minister John Howard to repair relations with the Bush White House by claiming that Downer had been taken out of context.

Today, whatever the discussions about citing the ANZUS Treaty in an effort to justify Australian participation in a US-led assault on China, the Liberal-National Coalition government is already engaged in preparations for war, confident of the backing of the opposition Labor Party.

As they have done in every major war, Labor and the trade unions are doing everything they can to stifle anti-war sentiment and demonise the targeted enemy. At Labor's recent national conference, the unions helped pass six resolutions denouncing China for "aggression" or "human rights abuses" on every front nominated by the Trump and Biden administrations, including Taiwan.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality in Australia and New Zealand is holding an online meeting in opposition to the drive to war against China at 4 p.m. [AEST] on Saturday, April 24. Register here.



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